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QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE OCCUPIED ARAB TERRITORIES, INCLUDING PALESTINE

Written statement*/ submitted by the Islamic Women's Institute of Iran, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[12 January 2001]

*/ This written statement is issued, unedited, as received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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1. As we commemorate Quds day for the year 2000 (1379 AHS), we are going through the saddest and most Painful of days and we are leaving behind us the most regrettable and disastrous of times. Our saddness and pain are on account of the innocent, defenceless people who have been martyred in the oppressed country of Palestine.

2. Almost 6 years have passed since the Beijing conference and the adoption by consensus by the entire international community of the "Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action" - in both of which the international community agreed on a wide range of lofty ideals and objectives as regards the protection and promotion of Women's rights and undertook to take effective action to that end. It is indeed a matter of grave concern that we are now witnessing crisis situations involving massive violation of human rights and fundemental freedoms of women and also massacre of a large number of civilian women and children in Palestine.

3. There are many cases of torture in Palestine but here, we would like to quote a news released by the Palestinian Working Women Society (PWWS) in November 2000 regarding the women workers' problems especially during the recent months.

4. In November 2000, a team from The Palestinian Working Women Society (PWWS) visited different working places in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to observe the workers' suffering, as well as the effect of this critical situation on them. About 2000 women were visited, working in extremely difficult conditions that these workers are suffering from. This is due to the following reasons:

- The siege and closures imposed by the Israeli authorities on the Palestinian occupation territories, which prevented the workers' arrival to their work places.

- Women working in tourism were completely fired from their jobs due to the absence of tourism during this critical situation.
- A group of women lost their jobs and they were not paid of the last period. Those working women who are still in their jobs, suffer lots of difficulties in reaching their working places, adding to this is the increase of transportation fees because the main roads are closed, therefore the drivers are forced to go through long dusty roads.

5. As reported by (PWWS), working women in Gaza have mentioned that they do not know their real wages despite the fact that they started to work long time ago. Their employers refuse to tell them of their actual wage. Therefore they get paid by fractions of their wage. They added that wages are getting lower in some sewing ateliers in Gaza to reach only 200 NIS ($50) per month or even less than that. Some women complained that their employers often demand that their employees work voluntarily during the weekends or considering some working days as a "support" for the ateliers without paying them.

6. Working hours could extend to 10 hours a day in some factories without pay for overtime hours often the employers use foul language with them and do not hesitate to cut down wages if the employees are late ten minutes in the fixed morning hours.

7. Women workers in the ateliers working on daily and not on monthly basis. Thus, they are not paid for the days when they are on leave due to sickness or in case of an emergency, or during the weekend. In general women employees do not know about the law that guarantees women's right pertaining to pregnancy and maternity leaves.

8. As to the timing of paying the wages there are no fixed dates and they are already so minimal. Nobody dares to ask the employer for a paycheque or her total wage.

9. Some working women mentioned that: after working for 11 years the employer has suddenly passed away. The inheritors have liquidated

the business. When they have asked for their rights of compensation they got $200 only covering their total of 11 years of service and on the condition that they sign a paper of exoneration relinquishing all their rights.

10. The rate of the men's wages who work equally in the same profession, sewing, is three times higher than their women colleagues this despite the fact that certain work that demands special skills are done by women.

11. Despite the sad facts mentioned above, according to a report released by the Palestinian Red Crescent, Palestinian women's participation in rescue operations and in emergency cases during the recent months was quite impressive, as they left their offices and joined their colleagues in the battle sites. According to MS. Randa Hamed from the Primary Health Care Unit of the Red Crescent the rate of women's participation in the rescue operation was higher than on previous occasions. She also added that some women have shown more alertness and readiness than their men colleagues. Fear, which is a natural sentiment, was almost non-existent, for women had no time to be scared, they were too busy carrying out their duties helping the victims of Israeli atrocities.

12. In theory, women have never been excluded from the UN's concept to human rights. The 1945 UN charter recognizes the equal rights of men and women and this principle has been maintained in the UN's formulations of human rights ever since. Hower several factors have prevented women from enjoying the promises made to them. There is still a huge gap between the articulation and implementation of human rights as it applies to women. Gender equality is not only a matter of social justice but also good economics. It is of foremost importance to women's well-being and development. Discrimination means losses in

productivity and lower welfare of women, their families, and society at large.

13. Generally speaking, women employees have the same difficulties everywhere and specially in the sewing business in Gaza Strip. The absence of law, oppressive conditions reaching medieval slavery, all this, is manifested in the total absence of the Ministry of Labour and its surveillance as well as the absence of Unionised Labour whose role non of the women is aware of.

14. These are the desolate conditions of working women in Gaza. Their plight is twofold: they are oppressed because they are labours and they are oppressed again because they are females.

15. Forceful action by the international community, including and in particular, the United Nations system, in militating against and stopping such trends of the violation of human rights of women in Palestine is imperative.

16. The voices of Gaza women beseech the decision makers, the Human Rights organizations, as well as the legal institutions to work seriously for the eradication of oppression that working women go through. Yet, it remains for working women to fight for their own rights for if they don't demand nobody will. Rights are taken but never given.

17. In Palestine women's problems have reached a critical level. Violence against women in the occupied territories has found an awful depth. Islamic Women's Institute of Iran condemns strongly the systematic violations of human rights of women in Palestine. We believe that it is time for the international community to come together and think seriously about the human rights situation in the occupied Palestine.